

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

January 18, 2011

President Obama's Proclamation on Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday	1
U.S. Seeks "Positive, Cooperative and Comprehensive" China Ties	1
Number of Free Countries Is Declining, Study Finds.....	2
Student Exchange Program Builds Knowledge Between U.S., Pakistan	3

President Obama's Proclamation on Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release January 14, 2011

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., FEDERAL HOLIDAY,
2011

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

Half a century ago, America was moved by a young preacher who called a generation to action and forever changed the course of history. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to the struggle for justice and equality, sowing seeds of hope for a day when all people might claim "the riches of freedom and the security of justice." On Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the holiday recognizing one of America's greatest visionary leaders, and we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King.

Dr. King guided us toward a mountaintop on which all Americans -- regardless of skin color -- could live together in mutual respect and brotherhood. His bold leadership and prophetic eloquence united people of all backgrounds in a noble quest for freedom and basic civil rights. Inspired by Dr. King's legacy, brave souls have marched fearlessly, organized relentlessly, and devoted their lives to the unending task of perfecting our Union. Their courage and dedication have carried us even closer to the promised land Dr. King envisioned, but we must recognize their achievements as milestones on the long path to true equal opportunity and equal rights.

We must face the challenges of today with the same strength, persistence, and determination exhibited by Dr. King, guided by the enduring values of hope and justice embodied by other civil rights leaders. As a country, we must expand access to opportunity and end structural inequalities for all people in employment and economic mobility. It is our collective responsibility as a great Nation to ensure a strong foundation that supports economic security for all and extends the founding promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to every American.

Dr. King devoted his life to serving others, reminding us that "human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle -- the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." Commemorating Dr. King's life is not only a tribute to his

contributions to our Nation and the world, but also a reminder that every day, each of us can play a part in continuing this critical work.

For this reason, we honor Dr. King's legacy with a national day of service. I encourage all Americans to visit www.MLKDay.gov to learn more about service opportunities across our country. By dedicating this day to service, we move our Nation closer to Dr. King's vision of all Americans living and working together as one beloved community.

NOW, THEREFORE, I BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim January 17, 2011, as the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday. I encourage all Americans to observe this day with appropriate civic, community, and service programs in honor of Dr. King's life and lasting legacy.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth.

BARACK OBAMA

U.S. Seeks "Positive, Cooperative and Comprehensive" China Ties

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and China are at "a critical juncture" and will need to pursue wise policies and be honest about their differences to keep their bilateral relationship "on a positive trajectory," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

In remarks at the State Department January 14, Clinton said that, three decades after establishing bilateral relations, "our economies are entwined, and so are our futures." In a new international landscape characterized by the influences of globalization and nontraditional or nonstate entities, the world is "moving through uncharted territory," and both countries need to look beyond outdated political theories that suggest China's rise will lead to conflict, she said.

"Some in the region and some here at home see China's growth as a threat that will lead either to Cold War-style conflict or American decline. And some in China worry that the United States is bent on containing China's rise and constraining China's growth. ... We reject those views," Clinton said.

"A thriving America is good for China, and a thriving China is good for America," she said, and U.S. friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific "want to move beyond outdated, zero-sum formulas that might force them to choose between relations with Beijing and relations with Washington."

The Obama administration intends to pursue a "positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship" with China and recognizes that its efforts will require "careful, steady, dynamic stewardship" that is grounded in reality, is results-oriented, and remains true to U.S. principles and interests.

Clinton said both countries "have to be honest about our differences" and need to "avoid unrealistic expectations that can be disappointed" by continuing efforts to expand areas of cooperation and narrow areas of disagreement.

She said the United States will continue to speak out on China's human rights record, including its censorship of bloggers, imprisonment of political activists and prohibition of religious freedom.

"As a founding member of the United Nations, China has committed to respecting the rights of all its citizens. These are universal rights recognized by the international community," she said.

By living up to its human rights obligations, China stands to improve its long-term peace, stability and prosperity, she added.

"An independent, impartial judicial system and respect for the rule of law would protect citizens' property and guarantee that inventors can profit from their ideas. Freedom of expression for everyone ... would help foster the open exchange of ideas that is essential to innovation and a creative economy. A vibrant civil society would help address some of China's most pressing issues, from food safety to pollution to education to health care," Clinton said.

The United States and China currently enjoy a positive relationship and have "the chance for a very positive future," she said. The Obama administration welcomes China's rise and its efforts to lift its people out of poverty and to "export prosperity and opportunity."

Urging "real action on real issues," Clinton said the United States is looking to China to join it in "meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow" with the goal of a better world.

Number of Free Countries Is Declining, Study Finds

By Jane A. Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — The number of free countries is steadily declining, according to the latest findings by Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization that monitors the state of democracy and human rights around the world.

In its recently released report, *Freedom in the World 2011*, Freedom House found that only 87 — two fewer than 2009 — of the world's 194 countries could be designated as truly free. Sixty countries were designated as "partly free," and 47 were considered "not free."

Global freedom — as measured by the level of protection of political rights and civil liberties of citizens — suffered its fifth consecutive year of decline in 2010, according to Freedom House. This represents the longest continuous period of decline in the nearly 40 years Freedom House has been issuing the surveys. Currently, only 43 percent of the world's population lives in countries considered to be free.

What's to blame for the decline? Bolder authoritarian regimes coupled with inadequate resistance from democratic countries, says Arch Puddington, director of research at Freedom House.

"The increasing truculence of the world's most powerful authoritarian regimes has coincided with a growing inability or unwillingness on the part of the world's democracies to meet the authoritarian challenge," Puddington says in the report. He warns that "if the world's democracies fail to unite and speak out in defense of their own values, despots will continue to gain momentum."

The United States, however, is one democracy that has been making democracy and human rights a major part of its foreign policy. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Michael Posner, who spoke at a Freedom House panel discussion about the report January 13, said the Obama administration is "increasingly in a range of discussions with other governments making clear the link between how they perform, how they act on human rights and democracy, and their ability to work with us as a close ally or a partner."

Freedom House gave its lowest possible ratings for both political rights and civil liberties to Burma, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Tibet, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. But China, Egypt, Iran, Russia and Venezuela are cited for having stepped up repressive measures with great brazenness, according

to the report.

Among the most notorious incidents of 2010, according to the report, was China's effort to persuade the Nobel Prize committee to reject jailed democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo as an award recipient. When it failed to do that, Freedom House said, China then pressured foreign governments to boycott the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony and threatened economic retaliation against Norway, where the awards were presented.

Egypt conducted elections with little hint of transparency, the report says. Iran arrested hundreds of political activists protesting the 2009 elections, regarded by many as "stolen." Russia showed blatant disregard for judicial independence in its sentencing of regime critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky. And, Venezuela pushed through legislation allowing President Hugo Chávez to rule by decree, constrain nongovernmental organizations and extend media restrictions to the Internet, the report says.

Among other trends cited by Freedom House is the role of organized crime. Mexico, for example, was downgraded by Freedom House from "free" to "partly free" because of the Mexican government's inability to stem the tide of violence by drug-trafficking groups.

Most Muslim-majority countries — with the notable exception of Indonesia — have failed to make progress in embracing civil rights for their citizens, the report says. And the failure to deal humanely with mass immigration, according to Freedom House, has tarnished the civil liberties score for France and other nations around the world.

On the bright side, Freedom House found improvements for Kenya, Moldova, Nigeria, the Philippines and Tanzania. And comparatively free and fair elections in Kyrgyzstan and Guinea helped pull those countries' rankings up from "not free" to "partly free."

Student Exchange Program Builds Knowledge Between U.S., Pakistan

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — Sikandar Hayat Sajid was halfway around the world from his home in Charsadda, Pakistan, and newly arrived at a university in the southern U.S. state of Tennessee, when one of his new American friends asked him where he had gone for the weekend.

Nowhere, he confessed. "I told him that I was in the dorm and feeling pretty bored. He told me, 'Oh, man, why didn't you tell me?'"

Hayat didn't have a problem with being bored again.

For the next weekend, the friend got together a group — including Hayat — for river rafting. "Believe me, I was having no idea what rafting is," said Hayat, who also did not know how to swim. On the river, on campus and as a guest at friends' homes, Hayat spent a semester immersing himself in America while continuing his engineering studies as part of a new U.S. exchange program for college students from Pakistan.

The first group of 50 students has now returned to Pakistan, while 50 others are spending the spring 2011 semester at college campuses throughout the United States. Their experiences are part of the State Department's Global Undergraduate Exchange Program-Pakistan, known as Global UGRAD-Pakistan, which launched in fall 2010. The State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs manages the Global UGRAD program, which provides scholarships to students from an array of countries around the world for a semester at two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities.

In addition to taking coursework in their fields, the Pakistani exchange students complete a course in U.S. studies, participate in community service and cultural activities, and improve their English as needed. The Pakistani students who recently finished the program said they also made friends and changed perceptions — Americans' perceptions of Pakistan and its people, and their own perceptions of the United States.

They also had surprises. Afza Asif, who studies business at Fatima Jinnah Women's University in Rawalpindi, said she knew that the U.S. school she would attend for the semester — Chadron State College in Nebraska — was coeducational, but she didn't understand how different that might be. "The person living next door [in] my dorm was a guy, and I was uncomfortable in the beginning," she said. "But then, the people in the United States have a very deep understanding of genders, and how to behave like there is not a big difference between a girl and a guy there. ... So it didn't bother me anymore."

And Rubab Zahra found that she could enjoy even a painful experience at St. Cloud State University in the frigid midwestern state of Minnesota: ice skating. "We don't have ice, so ice skating — never mind," she said, laughing. "I fell eight times when I went ice skating, so that was my first and last lesson. So I didn't go for ice skating again. But that was an awesome experience."

Zahra said any apprehension she had about being so far from home at age 19 disappeared quickly. "I was homesick, of course I was, the starting two weeks or so, but after that, truly speaking, there was so much fun and

there were so many things to do [in addition to] my studies, and I couldn't actually find time to be homesick or to be confused or to be frightened," she said.

The Pakistanis explored the mysteries of American football and baseball, and Hayat even played in a softball game between students in the American Society of Civil Engineers — his team — and those in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Hayat said the high point of his semester at Tennessee Tech University was his service as the first international student to be elected a senator in the student government. He said that gave him an insight into U.S. government generally, while a course taught him U.S. history. His social life, he said, taught him about American culture, and it took him far off campus, to the homes of classmates who invited him along to stay with their families and see more of the country.

The students said they found more similarities than they expected between life in Pakistan and life in the United States. They said the U.S. style of teaching is more informal but just as demanding, with a similar curriculum. Zahra, who studies biochemistry, said she was thrilled with the facilities at St. Cloud State: "We don't have such [advanced] labs there in my university," she said.

"I found some nice friends over there, and Americans are very keen to hear about Pakistan," Hayat said, who added that the image Americans have from the media is mostly of a Pakistan wracked by violence.

The students said they encountered only friendly curiosity and helpfulness over their Muslim faith no matter where they were in the United States. During Ramadan, Hayat kept food in his dorm room so that he could eat before dawn, and a custodian noticed it and arranged for him to have a refrigerator in the room. The cafeteria "changed the whole menu for us" to provide more vegetarian and fish meals, he added.

"I didn't feel anything uncomfortable regarding the religion, to be very honest," Hayat said. "There was a mosque beside our dorm on the campus, and we went regularly to offer the taraweeh prayers. ... My parents, they were surprised, [saying], 'You are in the United States and you are going for taraweeh?' I told them that, yes; it's the religious freedom over here."

"I really had to come out of my comfort zone," said Asif, who was the only Pakistani student at Chadron State. "And when I started to talking to people about my culture ... they were really very interested in my culture, in my religion, in Pakistan and especially in the political controversy that surrounds the region."

The students said they are using Facebook, Skype and text messages to keep in close touch with their American friends, and they talked of trying to get together again — possibly in Pakistan.

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)